

**REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD**  
**BOARD MEETING**  
September 18, 2025

Via Video Conference

**Welcome, and Roll Call:** Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. Eastern time.

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chuck Berry, Jan Hupp, Jane Neubauer, Chris Aldrich, Charles Fowler, Derek Ahl, Mike Jones, Kari Puffer, and Gary Thomas

**Board Members Not in Attendance:** Ryan Tyce, Renee Beutell, and JoLynn Stroda

**USDA Representative in Attendance:** George Webster

**Staff in Attendance:** Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

**Guest in Attendance:** Timothy Richards

**Agenda**

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to approve the agenda as presented.  
**MOTION APPROVED.**

**Special Presentation: Independent Evaluation of the CTPB/RCTB** – Timothy Richards with Arizona State University provided the Board with a detailed PowerPoint presentation of the marketing evaluation conducted. Following the presentation, Richards entertained questions from the Board.

Timothy Richards left the meeting following his presentation.

**Meeting Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to approve the August 21, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Chairman's Report** – Chuck Berry reported.

- a. **Nominations Committee** - Berry stated that he would be reaching out to a few Board members to make recommendations for Executive Committee positions for 2026.
- b. **September 23, 2025, Webinar** - Berry encouraged all Board members to attend the Intentional Communications webinar on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, featuring John Armato at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.

**Committee Reports**

**Finance Committee** – Mike Jones reported.

- a. **July 2025 Financials Revised** - Gray shared that there is a revised and final copy of the July financials.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to accept the revised copy of the July 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **August 2025 Financials** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the August 2025 financials. The next maturing CDARS will mature on October 17<sup>th</sup>, and it will be deposited into the checking account.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to accept the August 2025 financials as they

were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- c. **Update on producer Collection** - Marsha Gray shared that USDA representative, Sarah Richardson, mailed an official letter a couple of days ago, and it was received by the producer, yesterday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, via signature. George Webster shared that they have ten business days to respond to the USDA or RCTB staff. If no response is received, a second correspondence will be mailed. If no response is received, legal action will be initiated.
- d. **2024-2025 Fiscal Year Audit Update** - Jones shared that the Executive Committee will be meeting to work through the audit. Once completed, it will be presented to the Board for approval.

**Research Committee** - Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Update** – Knudson shared that all but two of the research contracts are in place.
- b. **September Webinars** – Knudson shared that the webinar held on September 16, 2025, was well attended. The next Webinar will be held on September 23, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern. John Armato, with Armato Barber Communications Consulting and Coaching, will present on "Intentional Communications: How to Make the Most of the Moment."
- c. **International Christmas Tree Research and Extension Meetings** will be held next in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, on June 7-12, 2026. Many of the international and national researchers will be present.

**Industry Relations Committee** – Chris Aldrich reported.

- a. **Update** – Aldrich shared that the report provided by Timothy Richards was a lot of information and would like to condense the data and present it to the industry in a palatable way. Marsha Gray shared that Michelle Rothmeyer has the report and will work on a way to present it to the industry. Board members discussed different ideas.

**Governance Committee** – Charles Fowler presented.

- a. **Order Changes** – George Webster confirmed that USDA is working on a final rule for the Board's changes, which has been submitted to OGC. Once a publishing date has been assigned, Webster will notify the Board. The USDA will continue to keep the Board informed of the final decision and the next steps regarding the Order.

**Compliance Committee** – Derek Ahl reported.

- a. **Update** – Marsha Gray reported that Jamie Hanselman continues to make contacts with non-reporting farms and that work will begin to identify possible audit candidates.

**Promotion Committee** – Jane Neubauer reported.

- a. **Update of Campaign** – Neubauer shared a few highlights from the current campaign:
  - Grower Survey has finished, the highlights from the survey were used to develop the first press release, which has been released to the press. Marsha Gray will email the Board following the meeting with three attachments: the 2025 messaging document, the first press release, and the media guide.
  - September 23, 2025, webinar with John Armouto - Neubauer encouraged Board members to attend.
  - Working with NCTA and the collaboration to amplify each other. The White House Christmas Tree will be selected next Tuesday, September 23, 2025, at Korson's Tree Farm in Michigan.
  - First-time buyers guide – stronger focus on younger millennial families and first-time buyers of real Christmas trees.

- Social media influencers – great options have been received, reviewing price, and determining who will represent the RCTB best.
  - Sweepstakes to collect a variety of images and videos of consumers enjoying their real Christmas tree, including shopping in various retail environments.
  - .org website – new social posts for growers to use on their social channels will be available very soon.
  - FleishmanHillard is developing the Dashboard with agreed-upon KPI's (key performance indexes) to ensure that benchmarks are being met.
  - Retail Locator – Jenny Tomaszewski shared that an email was sent on Wednesday, September 10, to everyone currently listed on the retail locator, requesting them to update their information for the 2025 season.
- b. **Virtual Farm Tours** – Marsha Gray shared that two farms have committed to host a tour, in the West: B.T.N. Of Oregon, Tyler Stone, and in the East: Barr Evergreens of NC. Working to secure dates in early November. Oregon in the Classroom will be assisting with the technology.

**Management Staff Update** – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Presentation to A GIFT SEED Committee** – Gray shared that A GIFT SEED is a large grant that was secured by Justin Whitehill, out of North Carolina. Gray was asked to present to the group in early October on the RCTB consumer survey.
- b. **White House Christmas Tree** – Gray was invited to attend the Whitehouse Christmas Tree selection event on Tuesday, September 23. Gray reached out to Rick Dungey with NCTA to inquire about the possibility of the RCTB promoting the White House tree selection on our social media channels, as NCTA doesn't have its own social media channels. NCTA approved.

**New Business:**

- a. **Service Agreement with Fishhook Development** – Marsha Gray provided via email to the Board the maintenance and support contract with Fishhook Development for the online payment system and the database, with an hourly rate of \$110/hour.

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to approve the contract with Fishhook Development at an hourly rate of \$110/hour. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**USDA** – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status - Non-responding Importer** – Webster shared that he spoke with the Office of General Council, and they are waiting on Leadership to sign off on the complete package that will be sent to the Importer. The last statement suggests that they would like some of it translated, but Webster is uncertain as to whether it is the complete package or just a portion. Webster hopes to have more information shortly.
- b. **Status – Producer Collection Issue** – reported under the Finance Committee report.

**For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:**

- Chuck Berry attended the Southern Christmas Tree Association meeting and the Georgia Christmas Tree Association meeting.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- a. **Limited Agenda Meeting** - The RCTB will have a limited agenda meeting on Tuesday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern, to approve the Financial Audit.
- b. **Tentative Board meeting on January 15, 2026.**

**Adjourn:**

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:22 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Tomaszewski, Staff, for Jolynn Stroda, Secretary